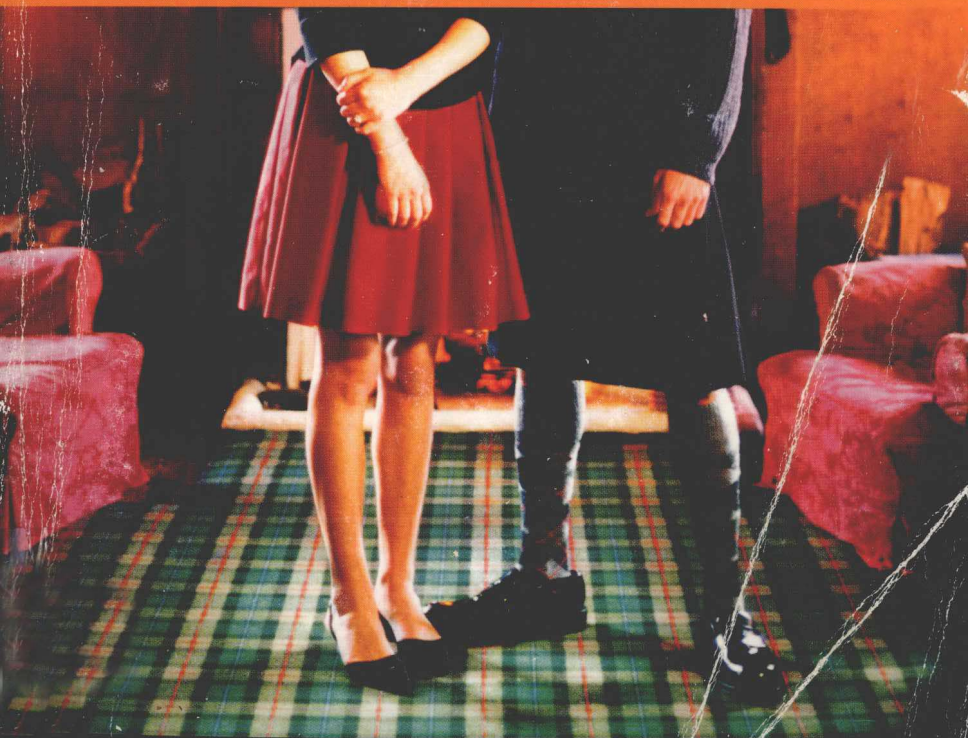




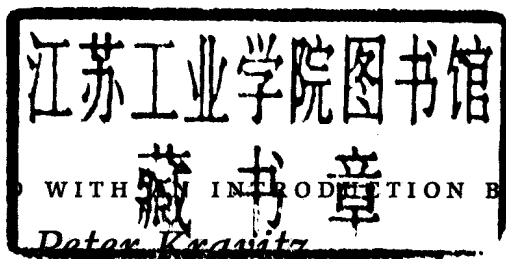
THE VINTAGE BOOK OF
CONTEMPORARY
SCOTTISH FICTION



EDITED BY PETER KRAVITZ

THE VINTAGE BOOK OF
*Contemporary
Scottish Fiction*

EDITED AND WITH INTRODUCTION BY
Peter Kravitz



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In memory of Edward Boyd
(1916–1989)

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THE VINTAGE BOOK OF
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Introduction

So you end up a typical Scotsman. Prejudiced, Christian (when it suits you), well-educated, nostalgic, nationalistic, willing to travel, pro-Irish (well they're in the same boat), aggressive, proud, single-minded, occasionally pissed, occasionally singing, not mean (as a nation we are rather generous, you'll find), willing to accept second place too often, expecting to lose, easily embarrassed, passionate and football daft, standing there, thousands of us, in Wembley Stadium at the game. England 5 Scotland 1. A nation mourns – member at.

Bill Bryden (1977)

We'll never do anything richt will we?

(Scots supporter to William McIlvanney at the end of
Scotland v. Iran in the 1978 World Cup)

In March 1979 the people of Scotland were asked whether they wanted their own parliament separate from England. The majority said yes. However, a last minute clause added to the bill stated that 40 per cent of the total electorate had to be in favour. This took non-voters to be saying no. Governments get elected on less.

In 1980 I started reading manuscripts for the Edinburgh publisher Polygon. The backlist consisted mostly of books about Scottish failures. There was one on the failure of the breakaway Scottish Labour Party, another on the *Scottish Daily News* – a failed attempt at newspaper publishing. And there were books about failures that failed to appear. Someone was commissioned to write a fan's diary of the Scottish team's failure in the Argentina World Cup of 1978.

Polygon was also due to publish Neal Ascherson's *Devolution Diaries*, written during the referendum debacle, in which he referred to the post-referendum years as 'the hangover of '79'. In some circles it was known as the 'deferendum' due to the lack of nerve exhibited by the electorate. In the end Ascherson decided they were too frank and instead deposited them in the Public Record Office in Edinburgh under a 'Closed' mark.

Around the time I started at Polygon, publishers released a flood of histories, companions, dictionaries and encyclopedias of Scottish literature. In most cultures these reference works might have had quite a long shelf-life, but the publication of work by Alasdair Gray, James Kelman and others in the early 1980s rendered the volumes that had excluded them obsolete almost as soon as they were published. In retrospect they were marking the end of a former era in Scottish literature and the beginning of a new one.

Anyone looking for the country's authors in a Scottish bookshop at that time would have been pointed towards reprints of Neil Gunn and Eric Linklater. Publishers were more interested in resurrecting dead writers as opposed to looking for new ones and grants from the Scottish Arts Council encouraged this. When on behalf of Polygon I sent them Kelman's second novel *A Chancer*, they deemed it unworthy of a grant towards publication costs. They had received a complaint from a Conservative Member of Parliament, Alick Buchanan-Smith; one of his constituents had picked up Kelman's previous novel, *The Busconductor Hines*, in an Edinburgh bookshop, and was shocked that taxpayers' money was subsidizing such language. Those who claimed to represent culture had lost their collective nerve.

There was the publication of the long-delayed *New Testament in Scots* in 1982 and the *Concise Scots Dictionary* in 1985. These became surprise (to the bookshops) bestsellers and were products of decades of work. W. L. Lorimer's *New Testament in Scots*, like Gray's *Lanark* and Kelman's *Not Not While The Giro and other stories*, were completed long before publication in book form. Lorimer first had the idea of translating it in 1945, began in earnest in 1957 and completed it in 1966. It took until 1983 to raise sufficient interest and funds to secure publication. He uses different forms of Scots to show different authors in the New Testament and when the Old Testament is quoted he uses Old Scots. The book's raciness and hybridity made the attempts by various writers and academics in the decade before to sort out an agreed form of Scots laughable.

Later on in the 1980s books and pamphlets came out glossing Glasgow speech, such as Stanley Baxter's *Parliamo Glasgow* and Michael Munro's *The Patter*, which topped the Scottish bestseller charts for months and went into several editions. Words that were being taken out of speech and print in the past couple of centuries were now being put back in, in the case of anglicized Scots, or left in, in the case of others.

Derek in Kelman's story 'Events in yer life' says, on turning on the TV one morning, that 'it was only the Scottish accents made it interesting'.

Eck in John McKay's play *Dead Dad Dog* has the answer: 'It's not ma accent it's your ears.' In a nice reversal, Alasdair Gray used a transcription of upper class Oxbridge English for 'The Distant Cousin of the Queen' section in *Something Leather*. Here your is 'yaw', poor is 'paw', literature is 'litritcha', here is 'hia', nearly is 'nialy' and Shakespeare is 'Shakespia'.

The sudden appearance in print of many of these writers has been called a boom by many commentators. In reality, however, it was more the result of a process: Alasdair Gray, Jeff Torrrington, Bill Douglas and James Kelman wrote for more than a decade before being published in book form in Scotland or England. Perhaps it took the failure of the Devolution Bill in 1979 to bring them to a wider public. There is, after all, a school of thought that says that when the politics of a country run aground, the people look for self-expression in culture.

The public acceptance or censorship of vernacular Scots has always been a symptom of political feeling in the country. In reaction to the Act of Union with England in 1707, there was a renewal of interest in the vernacular, followed by a reaction in Edinburgh around the middle of the eighteenth century when a guide book on how to excise Scotticisms from speech became popular amongst the literati. Its stated aim was 'to put young writers and speakers on their guard against Scotch idioms' and its influence is still obvious many generations later in the properly announced speech of Miss Jean Brodie. One exception was Robert Burns, whose writing was applauded in the 1780s by the same people who had set about removing Scottish words from their vocabulary.

In Glasgow during 1971 some writers had begun to meet every two weeks in a group coordinated by Philip Hobsbaum, a lecturer in the English Department at the university. This was the fourth time he had organized such a group. Besides an earlier one in Glasgow there had been groups in London and in Belfast (to which Seamus Heaney brought his poems) in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Here Gray and Kelman met each other and Tom Leonard and Liz Lochhead for the first time. Other writers at the group included the poets Donald Saunders, Aonghas MacNeacail and Robin Hamilton, and the science-fiction writer Chris Boyce. Each would submit a piece of writing in advance which would then be copied, circulated and read out during the meeting. The value of such encouragement and criticism at an early stage of a writer's career cannot be overemphasized.

Leonard's 'The Good Thief' had already appeared in the first issue of *Scottish International* back in January 1968. When he had tried to publish

poems in *Glasgow University Magazine* the printer declined because of the language. A few years later a typesetter wanted 'foreign language rates' for some of his other Glasgow poems. Leonard was probably the most established writer attending the Hobsbaum group. *Six Glasgow Poems* and *A Priest Came on at Merkland Street* were published to some acclaim in 1969 and 1970.

J. B. Caird (one of Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools in Scotland) ended a talk to the Association for Scottish Literary Studies in 1972 with the question 'Is there a possibility in fiction – as has been done in verse by Tom Leonard and others – for the phonetic rendering of Glasgow speech in the way Raymond Queneau has used Parisian speech in *Zazie dans le Metro*?' Like most people, he was not to know that over in Glasgow James Kelman was doing just this.

When Kelman and Gray first met at Hobsbaum's group they did not particularly like each other's writing, but warmed to each other personally. Gray later acknowledged him for helping the first chapter of *Lanark* read smoother. He included a drawing of Kelman on the frontispiece of Book One of *Lanark* while printing his story 'Acid' in one of the footnotes to plagiarisms in the novel. Gray had been working on *Lanark* since the 1950s. When he completed one of the four books it comprises he sent it to the literary agent Spencer Curtis Brown, who rejected it in 1963.

An editor at Quartet bought an option on *Lanark* for £75 after reading a half-complete version in 1972. When Gray finished his work four years later it was turned down because it was 'too long'. Two other London publishers offered to publish it if he split it into two books. During this time Gray made a meagre living selling plays to television and radio. In between he would go back to painting. He did murals in restaurants and churches, and for more than a decade made portraits of Glasgow citizens for the People's Palace Museum. Finally, he offered *Lanark* to the Edinburgh publisher Canongate in February 1977, who accepted it a year later. They went on to publish it in 1981. *Lanark* had been twenty-four years in the making.

The index to the *Glasgow Herald* for 1984 has the following entry:

GRAY, Alasdair

Artist who painted for his supper on brink of literary fame and fortune, Jan 9, 9a, P; Jan 13, 8c, C; [Three editions of his work published], Mar 6, 4g; £500 [Frederick Niven] award for author, May 10, 5e; Author gives miners £500, May 14, 1b, P.

In 1987 Gray used the advances of two books to organize a touring exhibition of the painters John Connolly, Alan Fletcher, Carole Gibbons and Alasdair Taylor, whose work he felt had been unjustly neglected.

Kelman had been writing since about 1967 and by 1971 had enough stories for a book. Through Hobsbaum he met the American writer Mary Gray Hughes. She got a publisher in Maine interested in the manuscript of *An old pub near the Angel*, his first book of stories. It was published in 1973 by Puckerbrush Press and was little noticed in Scotland or England. His work was starting to appear in magazines and occasionally in the *Scottish Short Stories* annual volume. By the mid-1970s Kelman had another collection of stories ready, was completing one novel and was well underway with another.

A good deal of cooperation amongst these writers in the West of Scotland began at this time; writing circulated in manuscript and addresses of hard-to-come-by literary magazines were exchanged. The best of these was *Scottish International* which lasted from 1968 to 1974. At the beginning of the 1970s it ran extracts from *Lanark* and published Alan Spence's stories. Two poets – Edwin Morgan and Robert Garioch – were on the board of the magazine. Morgan sponsored Alasdair Gray's application to the Scottish Arts Council for money to finish *Lanark* (he received £300 in 1973).

Many of the new writers from the West of Scotland found Morgan's poetry an inspiration as it took in urban life (especially Glasgow) and embraced the new. These were themes not often found in combination at that time. *Scottish International* was strange for a Scottish cultural magazine in several respects. Guided by its editor Bob Tait, it treated Hugh MacDiarmid as a poet amongst equals instead of installing him high on a throne. It also tried to cover Glasgow comprehensively for the first time.

In 1970 the *Glasgow Herald* did two features on Thomas Healy entitled 'From the Pick to the Pen' and 'Labourer Who Writes Stories'. They reported that Healy 'whose most recent story "The Traveller" reflects his experiences as a navvy on a hydro-electric site in the Highlands, has won at the age of 28, a Scottish Arts Council bursary of £500.' This allowed him to work on a novel of Glasgow in the 1950s. Some stories appeared in an anthology of new writers put out by Faber, who took an option on the novel but never published it. Nothing more appeared in book form. Until in 1988, maybe aware of the work we were publishing, he sent Polygon his novel *It Might Have Been Jerusalem*. He had been writing for more than twenty years without having had a book accepted. In his

second book, *Rolling*, his hero has a love affair with a schoolboy in Glasgow, gets dysentery in Madrid and ends up, via Germany and Australia, in a marriage of sorts. After publication, Healy was berated for creating a character who made everything secondary to drink. Many Scottish reviewers appear to seek redemption from books by Scottish writers. They approach them with different critical apparatus to that which they might bring to, say, an American writer. Like the councillors of Glasgow they prefer happy endings to hard-won self-determination.

In 1974, Bill Douglas wrote the novel *My Childhood* to raise money to allow him to complete his trilogy of films *My Childhood/My Ain Folk/My Way Home*, but it never found a publisher. The manuscript resurfaced nearly twenty years later. Apart from this, I have taken 'contemporary' to mean work published after *Lanark*. In addition I have made my selection from writers born after 1926. When I made a list of writers born between 1915 and 1930, there was a gap for five years after 1921 where none were born at all (although I can't quite believe it) so 1926 seemed like a good beginning. But any start date is arbitrary and all definitions are temporary and contingent. This means I have had to exclude writers as diverse as Alexander Trocchi and Elspeth Davie, Freddy Anderson and Robin Jenkins, or Naomi Mitchison and Alan Sharp.

In 1975 William McIlvanney, after winning the Whitbread Prize for *Docherty*, said he wanted 'to write a book that would create a kind of literary genealogy for the people I came from.' Meanwhile, Kelman was doing exactly this and getting rejection slips from London publishers who slammed the door on Scottish writers of fiction just as quickly as they had opened it. Not being published in book form, whether in Edinburgh or London, meant they had to build their own links with readers and other writers to avoid complete neglect.

If publishers in Edinburgh and London had their blinkers on when it came to manuscripts from new Scottish writers, the work was not sitting in drawers. Magazines and small presses evolved to plug the gap and they had an influence disproportionate to their size. For a couple of years from 1978 Kelman, Gray, Leonard, Lochhead, Spence and others distributed booklets of their work as the Glasgow Print Studio Cooperative with the help of its director Calum Mackenzie.

In 1979 Kelman began the first of two periods as Writer-in-Residence for Renfrewshire District Libraries. In an interview with the *Glasgow Herald* at the time Kelman said: 'I wanted to help ordinary people to become aware that books and writers are not sacred and unapproach-

able... Most people have something in them worth writing about if only they realized it, and I intend to have workshops in every local community to encourage people to both read and write.' In May of that year, five days after Margaret Thatcher's first election victory, Kelman put on – in his words to a reporter at the time – 'the first poetry reading to take place at Paisley Town Hall since W. B. Yeats in 1924'. Among those on the bill were Sorley MacLean, Iain Crichton Smith and Aonghas MacNeacail.

In the absence of interest from publishers or agents, authors in the west of Scotland continued to link up. More and more readings were organized. Here Kelman met Jeff Torrington, who had been a shop steward at the former Talbot/Chrysler car plant at Linwood. Torrington was in the middle of writing *Swing Hammer Swing*, part of which Kelman passed to me in 1983. It led to several Torrington stories appearing in *Edinburgh Review*. Torrington told me that when he first attended one of Kelman's writing groups in Paisley Kelman suggested that he knock all the stained glass windows out of his prose, referring to the adjectives and adverbs. But Torrington's favourite writers include Vladimir Nabokov and Ray Bradbury and as he enjoyed using these words they remained.

When Liz Lochhead ran a writing group in Alexandria, north of Glasgow, she met Agnes Owens who gave her the story 'Arabella'. Lochhead showed it to Gray and Kelman who loved it and soon became friends with the author. Several years on, in 1982, Gray passed me the typescript of the novel *Gentleman of the West* by Agnes Owens, which was published at Polygon.

I also heard about Janice Galloway from James Kelman. He had been judging a short story competition and photocopied some of her entry for me. I went on to publish several stories in *Edinburgh Review* and her novel *The Trick is To Keep Breathing* at Polygon. Later, Kelman was to bring Torrington and McLean to the attention of his publisher at Secker & Warburg. Galloway published the first work by Irvine Welsh as one of the editors of *New Writing Scotland*. He went on to be published by The Clocktower Press and then in Kevin Williamson's Rebel Inc. McLean suggested Welsh and later Alan Warner to the same editor at Secker & Warburg. There is a common strand here of writers using their own reputations to bring to people's attention the work of other writers. Just look at the cover puffs and you'll see how one writer praises another who in turn introduces another new writer's work. In his 'diplags' and 'implags' in the margins of *Lanark*, Gray uses a satire on academic footnotes to admit he has plagiarized sentences or parts of sentences from the work

of Kelman, Lochhead, Leonard, Spence and McCabe. This was an unselfish support network proving the validity of Ezra Pound's comment that no single work of art excludes another work of art. Tom Leonard made a huge magic marker banner of this phrase and put it along one wall of the room where his writing groups met in Paisley.

Scotland will be free when the last Church of Scotland minister is strangled by the last copy of the *Sunday Post*.

Tom Nairn (1970)

When I see one of these Free Church ministers on the street in Lewis, I feel like walking across the road and hitting him in the face.

Iain Crichton Smith (1985)

Most of the themes here – the art of keeping a fragile hold on sanity, struggles against moral intolerance and the causes and effects of drinking too much – would have made sense to another Glasgow writer, R. D. Laing. His work has been an influence on some of the people published here. What many of the writers have in common with him is rage, intelligence, humour and a curiosity and frustration about the central role of guilt in the Scottish psyche. His first book, *The Divided Self*, published in London in 1959 after he left Glasgow, is a psychological look at the everyday occurrence of split personality.

He felt that guilt develops when anger is not expressed but sent inward and two selves are created. Scotland can lay some claim to being one of the best purveyors in world literature of the *doppelgänger* or double. Since James Hogg's *Confessions of A Justified Sinner* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* many Scottish writers have explored this theme. Yet, what is remarkable about so much Scottish writing of the past fifteen years is how the double has disappeared. There is very little splitting. Some of the characters may be struggling to recover from damage but they are *whole*. They may be alienated from the values of society, but they are not alienated from themselves. They may be angry, but this comes out as rage and is not left buried to form cycles of bitterness and depression. They fight madness and avoid suicide: Patrick Doyle in Kelman's *A Disaffection*; Roy Strang in Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*; Jock McLeish in Gray's *1982 Janine*; Joy Stone in Galloway's

The Trick is To Keep Breathing; Helen Brindle in A. L. Kennedy's *Original Bliss* and Ralph in Iain Crichton Smith's *In The Middle of The Wood*. For these characters sanity is not given, but won. Then they are whole, not split people.

For his *Radical Renfrew* anthology Tom Leonard compiled a thematic list of contents which could be a thumbnail history of Scotland. The first five of the sixteen sections are religion, alcohol, emigration, employment and unemployment. Institutionalized religion still has a powerful hold on Scotland. Monty Python's *Life of Brian* is still banned from every cinema in Glasgow and in the early 1980s Glasgow University Union denied students permission to form a Gay Society.

In Alan Sharp's *A Green Tree in Gedde*, Moseby began to understand what being West Coast Scottish meant, with its preoccupations with guilt and sex and sin. Twenty-five years later, in *The Trick Is To Keep Breathing*, Janice Galloway sums up the prevailing ethos of Scottish schooling: 'apportion blame that ye have not blame apportioned unto you.' In *Looking For The Possible Dance*, A. L. Kennedy lists ten points that her protagonist Margaret, 'like many others, will take the rest of her life to recover from'. It is called 'The Scottish Method (FOR THE PERFECTION OF CHILDREN)' and includes the credo that 'guilt is good ... joy is fleeting, sinful and the forerunner of despair.'

There are more antecedents of these themes in the work of Glasgow writer Ivor Cutler (born before 1926 so outside the scope of this book). In *Life In A Scotch Sitting Room Vol. 2* his mother smells burning:

'Who's been playing with the matches?' asked Mother, looking into the box and shaking its contents.

I looked through the hole in my plate. You could have boiled a kettle on my cheek. ALL the children were busy looking guilty. It was our custom.

Not that long ago children in Scottish schools were still being punished by the tawse. The *Concise Scots Dictionary* defines it as 'a whip with tails; the lash for a whipping top; a leather punishment strap with thongs (since 1983 rarely and only in certain regions); also a child's word for penis.' Schools can oppress their teachers as much as their pupils. Teachers appear in contemporary Scottish fiction as people for whom sanity is no longer a given. Ralph in Iain Crichton Smith's *In The Middle of The Wood*, Joy Stone in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, Patrick Doyle in *A Disaffection* ('He just wanted something different. To not be a teacher

perhaps!) are all burdened with the pressures put on the country's educational system.

Whether because of Calvinism or Catholicism, Scotland has had hangups in abundance – especially around sex and drink. Then there is anger. Then there is guilt about this anger. Then the depression that follows when anger is internalized. Nowhere is this clearer than in the rage of Scottish men. A good deal of contemporary Scottish fiction shows the pressure put on Scots men to be real hard men. In *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, in my opinion Irvine Welsh's best book so far, Roy Strang is abused by his racist uncle. A few years later he helps commit a gang rape. Strang has been 'running away from sensitivity ... a fucking schemie, a nobody, shouldnae have these feelings because there's fucking naewhair for them tae go.'

In the 1970s two plays dealt with this theme overtly. Tom McGrath wrote *The Hard Man* about convicted murderer Jimmy Boyle and Bill Bryden's play *Benny Lynch* tells the story of the Glasgow boxer who lost it all to drink. William McIlvanney's novel *The Big Man* traces the life of a man who loses his job in contemporary Ayrshire and turns to bare-knuckle fighting to earn a living. Even the title of his collection of short stories – *Walking Wounded* – tells us that we are entering the arena where damaged men do damage to each other and have damage done to them. It is as if only a decade, not centuries, has elapsed since the wars with England. The word 'manliness' occurs very regularly in Thomas Healy's fiction and it is not surprising that his most recent book, *A Hurting Business*, is a memoir of being a lifelong boxing fan in Glasgow.

The story 'At the Bar' by William McIlvanney in this anthology has parallels in the novel *Gentleman of the West* by Agnes Owens:

Proctor's answer was to hurl a glass through the mirror behind the bar ... My mother gave a moan of fear. This excited Paddy's chivalrous instincts. He hurried up to Proctor and smashed a lemonade bottle on the counter over his head.

The main character of the book, Mac, describes the scars on his face, saying 'they were status for me'. Owens presents violence as a straightforward fact of everyday life, with little comment or judgement. Violence and anger (and fondness, which can sometimes make the switch hilarious) come out in language too. Most violence between people never results in a fight but remains in language. Kelman has given the example of writing about a few men in a pub. You can either write using the

dialogue that they might actually use or you can write using language they wouldn't use. If you do the latter then you end up censoring their whole existence. A writer has to make other decisions, such as, Does the narrator use the same language as the characters? In the prose of some writers in this anthology there is no such split.

In 1988 a magazine for English teachers in Scottish schools printed a review of *Gentleman of the West* which concluded that the book's 'usefulness as a school text is unfortunately limited by the realistic inclusion in the dialogue' of language associated with 'bouts of drinking and occasional houghmagandie'. The reviewer finished by warning teachers that 'the parents of your average "S" grade candidate would certainly be moved to protest.'

Censorship can take many different forms. I came across a peculiarly misguided example when I was editing *Towards The End*, a novel by the Glasgow writer Joseph Mills published in 1989 by Polygon. The job of an editor is to understand the author's intention and play devil's advocate to both the writer and to his or her own instinctive response. Although I didn't like some of Mills's florid metaphors, what made the book compelling was its attention to detail, its focus on the particular lived moments of the protagonist's life. Yet, whenever the character moved about the city, the Glasgow place and street names had been tipp-exed out on the manuscript.

'I'd like you to think about reinstating these names.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes.'

'It's just that the publisher in London that almost took the book said if I took them out it would have more universal appeal.'

Needless to say he was delighted to reinstate them.

In December 1990, the *Scots Magazine* – a favourite read among Scots abroad – published an article by Maurice Fleming entitled 'Scotland the Depraved'. In it he called for a return to the values of the comic classics of Compton Mackenzie and more publicity for writers who could celebrate Scotland as opposed to those he labels 'the terrible twosome': Kelman and Welsh, joined by Duncan McLean. He describes his targets as 'desperate to plumb even deeper depths of depravity'. These writers, he said, 'appear to view Scotland with undisguised and malicious disgust ... [portraying the place as] a nation of drunks, drug addicts and drop-outs.'

In 1992 the *Daily Record* printed the headline SEX SHOCKERS ON SCHOOL'S READING LIST and continued with reference to 'dirty books'

and 'classroom porn shockers'. In response to the action of a retired chemistry teacher on the Johnstone High School board five books were removed from the library's shelves for sixteen- to eighteen-year-olds. The books were *A Chancer* and *A Greyhound for Breakfast* by James Kelman; *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker; *The Cider House Rules* by John Irving and *Perfume* by Patrick Süskind. The reason given was that they contained obscene language and/or depictions of rape and/or child abuse and/or violence. As a follow-up the paper had sent copies of pages from these books to the Strathclyde Region's Director of Education who commented 'I am shocked and appalled... I'm taking urgent steps to ensure that they are not available to children anywhere in the region.'

The next day, under the headline, CLEAN UP AT PORN SCHOOL, the director of education commented: 'It was utterly unacceptable that such filth should ever have become available in the first place.' Subsequently, Robert Gould, the Leader of Strathclyde Region, told the school to take all post-1970 grown-up fiction off the shelves to be vetted. He was later quoted in a paper as saying 'I'm not much of a reader... No one talks like that, f-ing and blinding all over the place... You can't use language like that in public; if I spoke like that I'd be f***ing hounded out of office.'

This is not that different from those who only want a rosy image of their city written or painted or filmed. A standard criticism from this direction in Scotland was trotted out during 1996 for the film of *Train-spotting* and goes something like this: 'Yes I'm sure the book/film accurately represents life as it is lived for a proportion of the population, but to put this out as art or entertainment makes me feel uneasy. The book/film seems to condone all that is bad about our society. He needn't have written it because we see it every day in our streets and estates'.

Many newspapers still put in asterisks or dashes or blanks when they take exception to what is simply language. The *Glasgow Herald* would print stories in censored versions – removing the words from view and leaving nothing in their place – even after guarantees to the author. These writers were too important for the paper to be seen to be ignoring them but that didn't stop them doctoring the language. Several anthologies published with the school market in mind have obviously gone out of their way to pick a Kelman story or a Leonard poem with no language they don't like in it. The radio stations in Scotland still omit words without bleeping them: 'Well,' they seem to be saying, 'would you prefer not to have your story broadcast at all?'

The *Scots Magazine* got one thing right and that is the connection

between the so-called culprits. Duncan McLean has said, only half-jokingly, that he sees himself as the missing link between Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Kelman. McLean may come from rural Aberdeenshire but he has written about life in and around Edinburgh in a way that would simply not have happened unless he had come across Kelman's 'Not Not While The Giro' and *The Busconductor Hines*.

Some Scots do not believe a book is worth reading unless it has been praised in London. It often has to be published there as well. Bill Forsyth said his film *Gregory's Girl* was not given a proper cinema release in Scotland until it had the seal of approval from London. Many journalists, broadcasters and academics north of the border poured scorn on Kelman's experimentation and use of language until *A Disaffection* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

Whereas Kelman looked to America and Europe for a literary tradition, McLean, together with Gordon Legge, Alan Warner and Irvine Welsh – and to a lesser extent Janice Galloway and A. L. Kennedy – have been influenced by Kelman and Gray, in part for their tenacity and in part for formal and technical breakthroughs in their use of language. McLean says, 'When *The Busconductor Hines* came out in 1984 it just blew my mind. It was the voice. For the first time I was reading a book about the world I lived in. I didn't know literature could do that.'

Welsh also credits Kelman with 'setting the whole thing out so that people like myself can have more fun.' A. L. Kennedy has said that people like John Byrne, Tom Leonard and James Kelman 'made my generation of writers possible ... gave us permission to speak ... made us more ourselves – gave us the reality, life and dignity that art can at a time when anything other than standard English and standard address was frowned upon.'

The Busconductor Hines, Kelman's first published novel, did not reach the Booker Prize shortlist. However, Richard Cobb (the chairman of the judges), did express his shock that 'one of the novels seemed to be written entirely in Glaswegian' as if that was enough to pass judgement on it. Anne Smith, editor of the (then Edinburgh-based) *Literary Review*, said of it, 'Who wants to read 300 pages about the life of a busconductor where nothing much happens anyway?' When Kelman won the Booker Prize for *How Late It Was, How Late*, Simon Jenkins of *The Times* said the Booker Prize judges were glorifying a noble savage, a glib and condescending way of sidelining work that disturbs.